

Roundup: Serious dialogue between Pakistan, India can start only after India's 2004 general elections

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ISLAMABAD, Aug. 12 (Xinhua) -- Pakistan has clarified its stand on restarting dialogue with India, saying future talks should be held at the level of foreign secretaries in accordance with the agenda worked out in the past few years and the Kashmir issue could not be sidelined. The Pakistani leadership stressed that other channels such as people to people contact can create a conducive atmosphere for the dialogue but can not substitute for official talks. President Pervez Musharraf expressed the determination to make peace with India. He said Monday at a three-day international seminar on regional affairs that his country desires peace and will do its utmost to follow the track of negotiated settlement of all issues including Kashmir with India. He stressed that in the immediate context or before the resolution of political disputes, peace must be maintained through balance of power and through no-win situation created by the strategy of deterrence followed by Pakistan.

Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali emphasized the need to solve the Kashmir dispute early on a basis of equality and urged India to "give more." Talking with a 50-strong Indian delegation of parliamentarians, scholars and journalists visiting Islamabad, Jamali said the solution of the lingering Kashmir dispute is imperative for lasting peace and stability in the South Asian region. Referring to the need of a greater understanding towards solving all outstanding issues between Indian and Pakistan, Jamali said "solutions require sacrifices and usually the one which is big and powerful has to give more." He added that Pakistan wants to settle all issues with India on the basis of equality.

Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said there is an imperative need for Indian and Pakistan to initiate a dialogue process immediately at foreign secretaries' level. At the concluding session of the two-day conference from August 10 to 11, Kasuri said an agenda for talks worked out by the two countries' foreign secretaries in 1997 and 1998 and elements agreed before can provide the basis for a comprehensive dialogue between the two countries. He pointed out that the four-point formula about Kashmir presented by Musharraf to Vajpayee at the Agra summit meeting in 2001 remains a valid basis for progress on the issue. The formula envisages recognition of Jammu and Kashmir as a dispute which has been denied by New Delhi for dozen of years, starting meaningful and sustained dialogue, negating solutions that are not acceptable to either side and working towards a solution that is acceptable to Pakistan, India and the Kashmiris. "This is a realistic offer. We can still pick up the pieces and work towards a meaningful dialogue that will address the aspirations of the people of Kashmir," Kasuri said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Masood Khan also urged India to move fast to resume dialogue with Pakistan, saying there should be a calendar for the dialogue. Mentioning the visit of a large unofficial Indian delegation which arrived in Islamabad Saturday, the spokesman said that interaction between parliamentarians and journalists is good, but it could not be a substitute for negotiations at the official level. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, speaker of the National Assembly and head of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid), said at the peace conference that any peace talks must include the issue of Kashmir and noted that progress on other fronts would lack

substance if the flash point issue is not addressed. "Running buses and trains and exchanging cultural delegations between the two countries can not bring peace without the solution of the core issue of Kashmir," Hussain said frankly.

The 17-month tension between Indian and Pakistan eased after Vajpayee extended his "hand of friendship" in April and his Pakistani counterpart Jamali made a positive response with a "telephone diplomacy," inviting the Indian leader to visit Islamabad. In the past months, the two arch rivals have been approaching each other cautiously and following a "step by step" manner to resume their relations due to long-time misunderstanding and distrust. Indian and Pakistan resumed their full diplomatic relations and the New Delhi-Lahore bus service in July and are talking about the resumption of trade ties and air links broken after the terrorist attack on Indian parliament in December 2001. However, the two sides could not restart the dialogue process to solve their disputes or reach a consensus on the dialogue agenda. India insists that the dialogue can only start if Pakistan puts an end to "cross-border infiltration" and dismantles all terrorist infrastructure camps in Kashmir.

Pakistan reiterated that the "cross-border infiltration" is indigenous and Islamabad only gives moral and political support to the struggle in Kashmir. Analysts here affirmed that the serious and meaningful dialogue between the two nuclear neighbors can not start before India's 2004 general elections.